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INTERNATIONAL STATISTICS AND THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

By LUCIEN MARCH, *Statistique Générale of France*

The League of Nations is not yet the league of all the nations. The political work connected with the League is a heavy task, fraught with difficulties thickset with sources of division. But other kinds of work enter naturally into its line of business—easier work, capable of joining the good will and raising the thoughts of peoples: that is to say, scientific studies, social work, and all that trends toward the common well-being and the maintenance of peace in the world.

The statistical work may be counted among the lines of work most helpful to the League, and which are besides absolutely necessary to its deliberations. Be it a matter of distribution of population, of public health, production of raw material, international exchange of financial problems—whatever may be the question brought before the League, statistical data, carefully collected and methodically treated, are necessary to add fresh fuel to the discussions and to justify the decisions.

A precise knowledge of the economical and social condition of peoples, their strength and productive power, would be the best guaranty for universal peace, as it would prevent the practice of underhand economical struggles which often are a prelude to political conflicts.

No wonder, therefore, that the Council of the League of Nations, soon after the ratification of the Treaty of Versailles, thought of organizing international statistics for its own use.

I

During the session in Rome in June, 1920, the Council decided to intrust an international commission with a preliminary study of this question. The report of M. Destrée, representative of Belgium, was as follows: "A conference of statistical experts, which met in London last year through the initiative of the Secretary-General of the League of Nations, expressed the unanimous opinion that it would be of great advantage if all the work in the statistical field, whose accomplishment is a necessity in the political life of nations, could be organized on a uniform and centralized system. Any attempt, however, to realize this desirable object raises problems which cannot be solved without the help of experts, both statisticians and persons who make use of statistics. I propose that, to this end, a commission be set up."

The commission was definitely appointed during the session in Saint-Sebastien. It was composed of twelve members, six of whom were representatives of organizations already existent; of these six, two were delegates of the International Statistical Institute, and each of the four others represented one of the following institutions: The International Labor Office, the International Institute of Agriculture, the International Bureau of Commercial Statistics, and the International Institute of Commerce. To these delegates were adjoined four persons in charge of official statistical organizations, and one non-designated representative of Japan.

The commission held a meeting in Paris from the 11th to the 18th of October, 1920, under the presidency of M. Luigi Bodio.* The Secretary-General of the League of Nations had prepared agenda in four paragraphs concerning: (1) the conditions of the international organizations which collect, compare, control, and publish statistics, and the need of a new coördination; (2) the necessity of appointing near the League of Nations a central advisory committee; (3) the relations between the League

* M. Bodio unfortunately survived the fatigue of the journey but a few days.

of Nations and the institutions existent; (4) possible improvement of international statistics and the assistance that could be given by the League of Nations.

Though the above decision of the Council had in no way bound the work of the commission, it has taken for the basis of its work the agenda prepared by the Secretary-General.

But since the commission was appointed by the Council, its task was first of all to enter into the designs of the Council. According to a resolution approved in Rome and sanctioned in Saint-Sebastien, it appeared that the Council wished to dispose of statistics coördinated after a uniform and centralized system. On the other hand, since half the members of the commission were delegates of existing international institutions, the Council evidently desired a close collaboration of these institutions. However, the resolutions of the Council gave no indication whatever that this collaboration was desired. At the session in Rome the Council had decided that the League would pay the "indirect expenses, in other words those incurred by organizations such as the International Labor Bureau and others fulfilling certain special tasks; these bodies work to some extent autonomously, although they depend upon the League of Nations for payment of their expenses."*

A subsidy was granted in that way to the Union of International Associations. Besides, the Council of the League of Nations in Saint-Sebastien adopted an organization of international health similar to the one proposed by the commission for international statistics. However, as nothing either in the resolutions of the Council or in the agenda of the Secretary pointed out clearly that the commission was to study in detail the organization of international statistics, the commission decided to limit its activities to what had been distinctly requested of it, that is, to confine itself to laying down principles and to pointing out the relationships of the existing international institutions to which the Council had reserved a part of influence. It was in this state of mind that most of the members exchanged opinions.

Taking up the first question proposed for study, the commission found that there were a great number (more than a hundred) of international institutions, before the war, which set up, made use of, and compared international statistics. Only a few of them publish statistics regularly. Others occupy themselves chiefly with the methods and the coördination of all the statistics in general. Most of them limit their efforts to the matter in which they are especially interested. The International Statistical Institute belongs to the first class; the International Institute of Agriculture and the other institutions represented in the Commission are examples of those belonging to the second class.

These facts being established, the commission considered its next duty to be to affirm, as heading the advices which it had to send forth, the spirit of collaboration and unification which impregnated the decision of the Council of the League of Nations. In fact, it is not sufficient to extend the field of statistical investigations; it must be made certain first that the field of facts actually observed is intelligently worked on. To that end it is of great importance that the data collected in each country may be relied upon; that their origin and the way in which they have been collected may be exactly known. The methods used in the different countries to collect the statistical facts must also be in sufficient harmony to make the signification of each fact about the same in all the countries compared. Lastly, the classifications in which the numerical facts are arranged must be, if not exactly the same, at least nearly enough alike to give a certain uniformity.

* Official Journal of the League, no. 4, pp. 140-204.

The existing international organizations may usefully bring into coöperation particularly those persons whose studies are conducted in a purely scientific spirit, without being influenced by any material interest.

The commission, therefore, proved:

(1) That there already exists a certain number of independent international institutions which centralize and publish statistics, or which aim at unifying statistical methods and systems.

(2) That it is desirable to avoid overlapping and possible discrepancies in the figures representing the same phenomena.

(3) That the different organizations of the League of Nations find it necessary to handle statistics of various kinds in the execution of their duty, and it is extremely desirable that these various classes of statistical information should be collected on sound and properly coördinated statistical principles.

This point being agreed upon, the commission felt that it could not rely exclusively upon the international organizations; besides, these organizations—according to article 24 of the pact—are no part of the League of Nations.

Taking up the second paragraph of the agenda, the commission advised that an organization be appointed near the Council of the League to give the necessary advices concerning international statistics, and to help the League make the best use of the work already done by the international statistical institutions which keep their autonomy.

Moreover, the desired uniformity of statistics cannot be obtained without long and patient efforts; their imperfections and deficiencies are ascertained only by analyzing them and by trying to draw various conclusions. It would, then, seem to be unnecessary and harmful to await a perfect uniformity before commencing the coördination of international statistics. The reform will surely follow a deliberate and permanent setting to work: the organization which the commission had the authority to bring about may and must become the active agent of this reform.

But it is desirable that this organization ignore all interests except the truth and the scientific value of investigations. In fact, is it not to be feared that some statistics, and especially the methods used to establish these statistics, might be influenced by national tendencies or concerns, or by tendencies of classes of society, all very praiseworthy, which might come into collision, as, for instance, when it is a matter of climatological or epidemiological observations?

The commission desired to bring about this new coördination not only to collect and explain the statistics already compiled, but also to improve and develop these statistics. Now, experience teaches us that it is dangerous to wait for the urgency of events or for some special requirement before thinking of possible developments or progress. It is only by patient and methodical labor of long duration that it is possible to accomplish the work, often considerable and costly, that is required of statistical offices.

Regarding this matter two questions were considered: (1) Would the advisory council establish itself as a center for the statistics of the various countries? (2) How could the desired progress be brought about?

With respect to the first question, the advantage to be gained by the utilization of material already on hand and by the coördination of effort would seem to dictate the policy of appealing to international organizations whenever they could help effectually: and this course was decided upon. Furthermore, the commission asked that if organizations were requested to furnish work curtailing expense, the League of

Nations should pay for the expenditures. We have already stated that during the session in Rome the Council of the League had agreed to do this.

The second question increased the divergence of opinion already mentioned in connection with a preceding resolution. The necessity for studying the means of unifying and improving the methods and the classifications of international statistics was agreed upon; but some of the members thought that the principal part should be left to the Council of the League of Nations, guided by the advices of its Advisory Committee and by the wishes of the International Statistical Institute, whereas others preferred to appoint an additional assembly of statisticians.

It is natural to make use of what exists before creating new organizations. Besides, from the scientific point of view, a private institution, recruited by itself, offers more security for scientific independence than an assembly of persons appointed by the governments. The International Statistical Institute which succeeded in 1885 the former International Statistical Congresses, includes among its members the chiefs of the principal statistical offices, and some learned men who are not connected with these offices but who make use of their work. From what other classes of persons could the members of the new assembly be chosen?

The partisans of an additional assembly have supposed, without doubt, that in the proposed organization the chiefs of statistical offices would be better fitted to prevail upon their governments to institute the desired reforms than when they deliberate in the International Statistical Institute. The commission could not adopt that supposition, however. It held the opinion that motives of a political or a financial order, which in every state stand in the way of the progress of statistics, could be efficaciously opposed only by the Council of the League or by the League itself.

The commission, therefore, advised (1) that the suggestions that were to be transmitted to the different governments should be transmitted through the Council of the League; and (2) that the suggestions from the International Statistical Institute concerning the scientific point of view and the unification of methods should be solicited from the Institute.

Thus, the commission desired that the Council of the League be enlightened by the advisory committee and at the same time by the sole international organization which specially studied the questions of method. In addition, it advised that a copy of the tables that it would use be sent to the International Statistical Institute. The sending of these tables could not be construed as in any way an interference by the Institute with the work of the League of Nations or of the state statistical offices.

To compose the advisory committee the commission proposed to appoint a certain number of representatives from the principal international organizations which establish and make use of statistics. It could not do better than to have represented the institutions which the Council of the League itself had called to advise it. The commission considered it a duty, however, to appoint one more delegate each from the three most important statistical organizations: the International Statistical Institute, the International Institute of Agriculture, and the International Labor Office; and one delegate each from some other international institutions. In addition, a certain number of persons not connected with these institutions may be appointed by the Council of the League. These decisions nearly settled the principal questions, namely, the relations between the League of Nations and the existing organizations, and the assistance that might be given by the League toward the progress of statistics.

But a question was considered that was not found in the order of the day, namely, whether it would not be advisable to determine more exactly the working of the organization which had been created near the League of Nations by the preceding dispositions.

Some of the members desired to specify that the offices of that organization should form a section of the office of the Secretary-General of the League. It has been seen above that at the session in Rome the Council of the League admitted the advisability of intervention of private organizations. Besides, the commission had not been officially advised of any resolution which would justify its interference in the internal organization of the offices of the League of Nations.

Therefore the commission merely pointed out the interest that would be found in the permanence of the work of the advisory committee. It further advised that the Council, which could not have meetings of sufficient frequency, be given authority to delegate its powers, under conditions it should determine, to a permanent committee made up of some five to seven of its members.

II

With the passing of these resolutions, the commission had fulfilled the mission it had been charged to accomplish.

However, it had not treated all the questions that are to be considered in relation to international statistics and their utilization by the League of Nations. The most important of these questions is the centralization of statistics. A non-official commission, which met in London in August, 1918, resolved that question in the negative, on the supposition that the different classes of statistics would be established by different organizations. Later on, the Conference of Statisticians of the United Kingdom and the Dominions advised the contrary, and expressed itself in favor of the entire centralization. It is therefore reasonable to study the question carefully.

In the first place, it is a question that concerns each country individually, as well as a question of international interest; and each country handles it in a different way. In some countries the administration compiles the statistics. In such cases there is often a statistical council formed for the purpose of bringing about a certain uniformity in the views, the methods, and the classifications: sometimes the centralization is entire, and sometimes it exists only for certain classes of statistics.

The first system may support itself by considerations of a practical order. When it is a question of collecting the elementary data of statistics concerning a specified object, it is generally the staff of the department governing that object which collects the data. A central statistical office would not have the same authority over that staff as the department to which it belongs. And, besides, the collecting of data is, as least some part of it, an accessory element of the administrative work itself. For instance, the health administration intrusted with the notation of cases of infectious diseases in order to prepare immediately the efficacious measures to be taken, cannot fail to note the number of those cases. So one may conceive that in a particular state there might be some objections to the centralization of statistics in spite of the advantages which appear especially in an international organization, and which have determined several states to establish it completely, namely, the Netherlands, Canada, Rumania, Poland, Czecho-Slovakia; other countries have for a long time centralized their statistics to some extent.

The objections disappear entirely in international organizations. Except in some special cases, it is no longer a question of collecting elementary data: the chief purpose of the international organization is to coördinate statistics compiled by other

organizations. Now, the statistics include a general technique which suits all the materials used, and a special technique for each material.

If each organization appointed for a particular class of research itself establishes and coordinates the statistics relating to that class, it is absolutely necessary that that organization should comprise an office accustomed to statistical work, able to criticize numerical data received when comparing them or analyzing their differences, and able also to draw out properly their characteristics and the relations derived therefrom. In the same manner, if a central organization is intrusted with the centralization of all the statistics, whatever may be their origin, it will have to be subdivided into groups accustomed to the various kinds of research which require a particular technique to appreciate properly the quality of corresponding numerical results.

For instance, the International Office of Public Health requires mortality and morbidity statistics, and statistics of population generally, in order to measure the danger of certain diseases, to ascertain the results of measures it recommends, etc. It is suitable that the section intrusted with the centralization of statistical data should include some clerks able to discern the characteristics of the diseases, and at the same time able to determine the terms of comparison of gathered data and to appreciate the value of these data—in a word, to utilize them scientifically.

In like manner, in a centralized organization the section intrusted with the statistics relating to the vitality of populations should include some officers able to appreciate the characteristics of that vitality, and to determine the real nature of the diseases and their classification. In this case, the question is reduced to this: It is desirable to incorporate into the health organization or into the central statistical organization the section intrusted with the statistics relating to the vitality and the sanitary conditions of the populations.

But the Public Health office is not the only organization concerned with this class of statistics. The department that studies the population, the one dwelling upon professional matters, an insurance organization, or an emigration bureau will have need of some at least of these statistics. Will it be necessary for each one of them to collect data of the same order, and in many cases, according to different methods?

In short, the question is to know whether the sections intrusted with statistics peculiar to different organizations of the League of Nations shall be placed respectively under different authorities or under the same authority. If the former plan is adopted, each section will have its peculiar tendencies, will endeavor to acquire directly the information it is interested in, under the form that seems to be the most convenient; and it will treat this information according to its own inspiration or that of the director of the organization to which it belongs. Doubtless a central commission would be created where the chiefs of the sections could confer with one another. But experience shows us that a commission is rarely an active body and that it is unsuccessful in overcoming personal tendencies, those of corporations, or the reasons for accommodation.

On the contrary, if the particular statistical sections are placed under one authority, that authority will have but one duty—to cause the rapid compilation, the accuracy, and the uniformity of data. It will be known in every country that an impartial organization, free from any political or administrative aims, or class, school or opportunity tendencies, superintends the elaboration of the statistical data supplied by all nations. Furthermore, the overlapping, and the requests from different sources relating to the same object will be avoided. Lastly, the publications will contain only comparable facts, coordinated and represented with method and in a proper scientific spirit.

For the last few years, the permanent bureau of the International Statistical Institute, which M. Methorst superintends with so much care and intelligence, has been a good example of a useful and scrupulous centralization of statistical data compiled throughout the world.

It is undoubtedly of world-wide interest to enlarge as much as possible the field of international statistics. Through statistics the nations would become more closely united, for they would know one another better. If they are accurate and impartial, statistics are an important element in bringing about reciprocal acquaintance and mutual confidence. They furnish indexes desired by parliaments, books, or the press. But hitherto no admitted authority has given to those indexes the necessary attention, or has determined the extent of their use. Would it not be one of the benefits of the League of Nations if the degree of accuracy were increased concerning the principal facts of international life? And would it not be a benefit to have an organization which, in joining for a common labor the existing international organizations without interfering with their independence, and in unifying the coördination of international statistics, would prevent overlapping, waste of time, and confused methods, and would enlarge the classifications of international statistics?

The commission intrusted by the Council of the League of Nations with the study of the scheme for such an organization has laid down the basis for it, but it has made the plans sufficiently flexible to allow the new body to be harmoniously suited to the other structures of society.

REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL COMMISSION APPOINTED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

BY R. H. COATS, *Dominion Statistician for Canada*

A reference to the appointment of this Commission appeared in the *QUARTERLY* for September, 1920 (page 356). The Commission consisted of representatives of the following bodies, namely, the International Labor Office, the International Institute of Agriculture, the International Bureau of Commercial Statistics (Brussels), the International Institute of Commerce, and the International Statistical Institute, together with the following persons: Lucien March (France), R. H. Coats (Canada), J. de Elola (Spain), Luigi Bodio (Italy), A. W. Flux (Great Britain), and M. Marumo (Japan).

The terms of reference drawn up by the Secretary-General of the League, as interpretive of the minute of the Council of May, 1920, were as follows:

1. To advise the Council of the League of Nations with reference to:
 - (a) The extent to which the work of obtaining, collating, examining, and publishing international statistics is already carried out by international bodies;
 - (b) The extent to which the published and unpublished work undertaken by these bodies requires or will require further coördination.
2. To consider and report upon the desirability of instituting a central advisory council on statistics for the purpose of advising the League of Nations concerning the coördination and standardization of statistics, and, further, to report upon the constitution and duties of such a council, should its institution be recommended.
3. To consider and report upon the relationship of the existing international statistical institutions to the League of Nations.
4. To consider in what directions international statistics require further development and in what manner the League of Nations may profitably assist such development.

The discussions extended over eight meetings, with Senator Bodio as chairman. At an early stage a difference of opinion arose as to the scope of the questions submitted